[A]FRICAN DIRECTORY

Human Rights Organizations

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Human Rights Internet (HRI) and the
Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM)

1996

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Human Rights Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa

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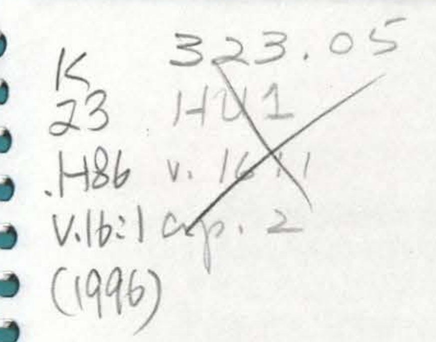


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Cover photo by
Laurie S. Wiseberg

Preface

This African Directory is part of the overall research program of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM). SIM conducts and publishes research in the field of human rights. So far, its activities have focussed mainly on the role of the United Nations and the regional human rights systems in Europe and the Americas.

The African continent offers a challenging extension of SIM's activities. The African regional system of human rights protection is still relatively new and in the process of development. African non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play an important role in strengthening this system.

NGOs help by providing necessary information on the human rights situation in their own countries to the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights. They can also be instrumental in making the African human rights machinery better known in their own countries. It is of vital importance that these NGOs can be relied on for their impartiality, reliability, and truthfulness. NGOs' reputations and the impact they can have depend on the reliability of the information which they provide, as well as the human rights values (which are shared universally in the human rights movement) they represent.

This report, which was prepared by our Canadian colleagues at Human Rights Internet and is the first in a series, is warmly recommended.

Prof. dr. Peter R. Baehr
Director of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM)

Introduction

This African Directory is a co-operative effort of Human Rights Internet (HRI) in Ottawa, Canada, and The Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM) in Utrecht.

The project originated in the Dutch government's interest to better understand the needs of African human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), given the explosive growth of indigenous NGOs across the continent over the past five years. As one-party dictatorial regimes have eroded under the pressures of democratization, private associations have formed, demanding women's rights, the right of development and to a sustainable environment and other human rights.

Since HRI gathers and maintains information on the work of human rights NGOs worldwide and had published an African Human Rights Directory in 1989, SIM asked HRI to undertake a new survey to update and expand the information on NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa.

The result is a volume that contains information on approximately 750 organizations (in 53 African countries) concerned with human rights and social justice. NGOs comprise most of the entries, although governmental and inter-governmental organizations with a human rights mandate are also listed.

As before, we have defined human rights broadly to permit the inclusion of not only organizations focused on the security of the individual, civil and political, or economic, social and cultural rights, but also organizations concerned with women's rights, labour rights, the rights of children, the rights of persons with disabilities, and the rights of refugees. Also included are bar associations and groups which offer free legal aid and services, religiously-oriented justice and peace groups, and organizations concerned with the right to a healthy environment or the right to development.

While the directory's scope is continental, the initial survey (undertaken by HRI from June to September 1994) was restricted to sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the volume is uneven, with the information on some regions more comprehensive than on others.

Given the depth of the transformations occurring in Africa, and the upheavals taking place in certain regions — Rwanda, Somalia, Liberia and the Sudan to name only a few — a volume of this sort is bound to contain more information on some areas than on others. For example, when we began work on this project, South Africa was still under the apartheid regime. Since April 1994, when the country held its first multi-racial elections, enormous changes have taken place in South African society and, concomitantly, in the universe of human rights NGOs. Since we have not had the time to document those changes accurately, we include only contact information (address, telephone and fax numbers) for South African organizations.

Organizations' Subject Focus

Academic Freedom

Children and Children's Rights

Community Organizing and Community Development

Cultural Rights

Democracy

Disabled Persons and Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Education and Educational Institutions

Environment and Environmental Rights

Housing and Housing Rights

Human Rights General

SUBJECT INDEX

Law, Rule of Law, and Legally-Oriented Organizations, including Bar Associations

Minorities and Indigenous Peoples

Peace, War and Conflict Resolution

Peasants and Farmworkers and the Right to Land

Poverty, Hunger and the Right to Food

Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression, Media and Communications

Prisoners and Prisoners' Rights, including Political Prisoners

Refugees and Internally Displaced People

Religiously-based Organizations and Freedom of Religion

Slavery

Student and Youth

Torture

United Nations

Women and Women's Rights, including Violence against Women